

**Dickinson County Conservation Board public meeting**

**6 p.m. June 19, 2019**

**Dickinson County Nature Center, Okoboji**

**Vice chair: Steve Anderson**

**Board members: Willia Mueske, Joan Gronstal**

**Employees: Lee Sorenson, Kiley Roth**

**Public: 143**

**Call meeting to order 6:03 p.m.**

**-Brooks Golf public meeting**

-Sorenson introduced Ted Kourousis from Northwest Iowa Planning and Development, who is facilitating the meeting. Dickinson County Conservation Board took ownership of the course when an anonymous donor gave \$3 million to the Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County, which purchased the course and then gave it to the DCCB. The only stipulation is the course is under a conservation easement to protect it from future development.

"The board has not discussed this or made any decision about the future of this property. We waited to get public input from you guys before making a decision," Sorenson said.

Brooks Management LLC will continue to operate the golf course through the end of the year. If the course continues as a course, it will be out for an RFP for public bid.

-Perry Pearson read a statement for a group of members of Brooks Golf Club. His family were former owners of the course, and he mentioned that Brooks is the second oldest golf club in the state. "We believe it's an icon in the Lakes community." One of the concerns is the Lakes area will lose an icon after the Inn was demolished in 2018, and also mentioned that taxes will be missed and the local citizenry should not be subject to taxes to support the course. Also mentioned was the impact to economic development if the course should be closed or reduced.

-John Vernon: He is an Okoboji resident and former greenskeeper that supports 18 holes at Brooks with the western 9 being made a community garden, modeled after the Spencer community garden with individual plots leased to people.

-Eric Hoiem: He called Brooks iconic, and from a beauty standpoint he recommended keeping it as a golf course. As an economic standpoint, he thinks it could cost a lot to manage it not as a golf course. He said not all visitors come to use the lakes or trails, some come to golf.

-Randy Rohlfsen: Pro and owner at Emerald Hills, he said he is sentimental and would like to see it stay alive. He said many people come for three-day golf trips, touring different courses in the area. He would like to see it stay open as 18 or 27 holes.

-Matt Richter: Representing the Arnolds Park City Council and the University of Okoobji, he would like to echo Randy.

-Owen Primavera: He said the golf course already is a conservation area and it could be kept just the way it is because of the wildlife that is already there. He would like to see it stay as the 27 holes and utilize excess areas for native plantings. He has been a member there since the 1970s. As chairman of the board of adjustment for the city of Okoobji, he said they want to keep the place as residential as possible.

-Bob Waters: He said he spends 100s of hours on the course in the summer and grooms cross country ski trails on the course in the winter. He suggested experimenting with grass planting to keep the wind from blowing snow around the course in the winter.

-Paul Halpine: He just came from Brooks Golf, where 144 golfers from outside of the Lakes area were playing golf and mentioned the economic impact that has on the area. He also mentioned that 27 holes is attractive because golfers can easily get on the course. If there is a change of any area to prairie, it could cost funds to replant. He commended Bret Hetland for making the course environmentally friendly.

-Dan Tohman: Speaking on behalf of Arrowwood and Regency Hotel Management, and also a former member of the tourism committee, he would like to see it stay Brooks Golf as either 18 or 27 holes. His company operates in a lot of tourist areas throughout the country, and a unique thing about the Iowa Great Lakes is the variety of activities beyond the lakes.

-David Thoreson: A local photographer and conservationist, he utilizes the trails in Kenue Park for running. He doesn't think there are enough low impact, quiet sports in the Lakes area. He thinks it would be good to add a perimeter path and wetland areas in the course, either with 18 or 27 holes.

-Brett Harris: In addition to what else has been said, he added that thousands of dollars are raised for local charities through tournaments at Brooks Golf each year. He thinks keeping it 27 holes keeps it unique and lets the public play while private events are also going on.

-Joel Johnson: He thinks Brooks should stay 27 holes and would like to hire a management company that could make it a destination golf course on par with the other attractions in the area. He said the area has good golf but not great golf.

-Marj Rohlfen: A resident of Okoobji that lives along the golf course, she enjoys it as it is.

-Bret Hetland: The current general manager of Brooks, he said Brooks has impacted the community in an indirect way. He was hired and has made an impact in the community, and he said whoever follows him will also be able to make an impact in the community beyond just working at the course.

-Duane Cruze: A LeMars resident, Plymouth County Conservation Board member and member of Pheasants Forever, he and his wife golf at Brooks Golf and see lots of wildlife on the course. He suggested utilizing the wild areas on the course for conservation and just have the course shut down

parts for programming. He also suggested getting a long-term lease, such as 10 years, for a management company.

-Nick Christensen: A member of Brooks Golf, he mentioned the issue with golf courses is the profitability. He would like to see it stay 27 holes but also suggested maybe making a round of 6 holes, so that people could golf in a shorter amount of time if they wanted to.

-Bernie Saddles: He would like to see it stay a course but not to give it to a management company that would raise rates past what common people can pay.

-Karmon De Koster: She said she doesn't mind if it's 18 or 27 holes and how it's laid out, but she wants it to stay a golf course.

-Mike Fliss: He is in favor of it being a 27-hole golf course and said golf impacts economic development throughout Iowa and shutting it down would decrease tourism dollars in the Okoboji area.

-Aaron Jones: He asked the board to consider that the nature center and golf course could co-exist with conservation and golf, with the course at 27 holes.

-Duane Rosch: He would like his family to continue to come to the Lakes area.

-Sorenson wanted to clarify that the portion of land along Highway 71 that is overgrown is not part of Brooks and is owned by a separate entity.

-John: He called Brooks Golf a unique asset and doesn't want to see the decision made too quickly. He thinks conservation and recreation could be brought together and doesn't want to see another icon lost.

-Birding on the Green was mentioned.

-Written comments are still being taken. E-mail [naturecenter@co.dickinson.ia.us](mailto:naturecenter@co.dickinson.ia.us)

-Anderson said thank you to people for coming. No decision has been made, but board members got ideas they had not thought about yet, and a decision will be made soon.

-Greg Richards: He asked if there was a deadline to make a decision.

-Anderson said a one-year agreement is in effect, and the deadline is to make sure a plan is put into place by the end of the year. If it remains under a management company, an RFP would be sent out and there would need to be time to put that into place and for the management company to prepare.

-Gronstal asked how many people golfed at or were members at Brooks.

-Gronstal motion to adjourn, Mueske second. Approved. Adjourn at 6:58 p.m.